

A/an and one

A

We use **a** before words that begin with a consonant sound. Some words start with a vowel *letter* but begin with a consonant *sound*, so we use **a** before these words, too:

- **a** university (/ə ju:n.../) **a** European (/ə juər.../) **a** one-parent family (/ə wʌn.../)

We use **an** before words that begin with a *vowel sound*:

- **an** orange **an** Italian **an** umbrella

These include words that begin with a silent letter 'h':

- **an** hour **an** honest child
an honour **an** heir (= a person who inherits money etc., when someone dies)

and abbreviations said as individual letters that begin with A, E, F, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, S or X:

- **an** MP (/ən em pi:/) **an** FBI agent (/ən ef bi: ai.../) **an** IOU (/ən ai əu ju:/)

But compare abbreviations said as words:

- **a** NATO general (/ə neɪtəu.../) **a** FIFA official (/ə fi:fə.../)

B

We can use **a/an** before singular countable nouns (see also Unit 50).

Sometimes we can use either **a/an** or **one**:

- We'll be in Australia for **one** (or **a**) year.
- Wait here for **one** (or **a**) minute, and I'll be with you.
- She scored **one** (or **a**) hundred and eighty points.

Using **one** in sentences like these gives a little more emphasis to the number.

However, we use **one** rather than **a/an** if we want to emphasise that we are talking about *only* one thing or person rather than two or more:

- Do you want **one** sandwich or two?
- Are you staying just **one** night?
- I just took **one** look at her and she started crying.

We use **one**, not **a/an** in the pattern **one...other / another**:

- Close **one** eye, and then the **other**.
- Bees carry pollen from **one** plant to **another**.

We also use **one** in phrases such as **one day**, **one evening**, **one spring**, etc., to mean a particular, but unspecified day, evening, spring, etc.:

- Hope to see you again **one day**. • **One evening**, while he was working late at the office ...



C

We don't use **one** when we mean 'any one of a particular type of thing':

- I really need **a** cup of coffee. (*not* ... one cup of coffee.)
- You can never find **a** paper clip in this office. (*not* ...one paper clip)

We also use **a/an**, not **one**, in number and quantity expressions such as:

- three times a year half **an** hour a quarter of **an** hour a day or so (= about a day)
- 50 pence **a** (= each) litre (notice we can also say '...for one litre')
- a week or two (= somewhere between one and two weeks; notice we can also say 'one or two weeks')
- a few a little a huge number of...

We use **a** rather than **one** in the pattern **a...of...** with possessives, as in:

- She's **a** colleague of mine.
- That's **a** friend of Bill's.

6.1 Write a or an in the spaces. (A)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 unreasonable decision | 8 universal problem |
| 2 unit of work | 9 eucalyptus tree |
| 3 honourable man | 10 X-ray |
| 4 UFO | 11 T-shirt |
| 5 happy girl | 12 H-bomb |
| 6 elephant | 13 hospital |
| 7 BBC programme | 14 UNESCO worker |

6.2 Correct the sentences if necessary, or put a ✓. In which sentences are both one and a/an possible? (B & C)

- I teach four days one week.
- Jenny's baby is only one week old.
- Have you got one match, please?
- You won't believe this, but it cost over one thousand pounds.
- One summer, we must visit Sweden again.
- They cost \$10 one kilo.
- I've known him for one year or so.
- She's already written one novel since she retired.
- Help! There's one mouse in the cupboard!
- She's one cousin of the king's.
- When you get to my age, you just take one day at a time.
- Cross-country skiing is easy. Just put one foot in front of the other.
- Can I have one little more rice?
- One large quantity of petrol escaped from the tank.
- We hadn't got one baseball bat, so we had to use one tennis racket.
- I had one last look around the house, locked the door, and left.



6.3 Which is correct or more likely, a/an or one? If both a/an and one are possible, write them both. (B & C)

- It weighs over hundred kilos.
- I only asked for pizza – I didn't want three of them.
- I wouldn't allow child of mine to be treated in that way.
- It only took us week to drive to Greece.
- I've always wanted to own silver-coloured car.
- sandwich isn't enough. I usually eat four or five.
- Policies differ from state to another.
- Less than three quarters of hour later, she was home.
- All of the competitors completed the race, with just exception.
- She left home late morning and hasn't been seen since.
- The best way to learn musical instrument is to find enthusiastic teacher.
- Somewhere in the distance, bell rang.